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SPECIAL ANALYSES

POLAND: Post-Strike Prospects

In the period immediately before the Polish regime and the Baltic workers reached a settlement, the situation had deteriorated steadily. It seemed to us that the continuing cohesion of the workers and their persistent demands for free trade unions and other political concessions, combined with the Polish Government's disunity and inability to control developments, were creating a momentum that in time might bring about a Soviet decision to intervene militarily in Poland.

The compromise reached last weekend interrupted that trend. The parties involved accepted it because they felt that the alternative was disaster. The possibility of Soviet invasion was one thing that both the workers and the party leaders most wanted to avoid; the Soviets, also, wanted to avoid it as long as they were confident that Communist Party control of Poland could be maintained.

So far, the workers clearly are the winners. They refused to be satisfied with economic concessions. They wrung from the regime a settlement that offers them a chance to institutionalize their right to represent the interests of the industrial work force of Poland over the longer term. Under their pressure regime unity crumbled; negotiators were replaced and critics of the regime's economic policy and performance were readmitted to party leadership. The Soviets brought no great public pressure to bear, and massive violence was avoided.

Divided within itself and having made political and economic promises it will not be able to honor in full, the regime may confront a myriad of problems. The most severe include:

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- Containing the ambitions of Poland's new worker leaders. With a heady sense of their new power, these leaders will be extremely sensitive to any sign that the regime is not honoring their hard-won gains.
- Restoring its own unity and common purposes at a time when the authority of party leader Gierek is questionable.
- Selecting a new, mid-to-long term strategy to deal with Poland's economic dilemma--how to service the huge foreign debt without lowering the standard of living.
- Convincing the Soviets and their East European allies that its concessions to the workers have not undermined its ability to rule Poland.
- Discouraging the powerful Polish Catholic Church from ending its cooperative relationship with the regime.
- Inhibiting Western support to Poland's new worker organizations while maintaining access to economic assistance and collaboration in certain foreign policy areas.

Outlook

How the problems confronting the Polish regime will develop, and with what combined impact, cannot be foreseen with any clarity, even by the Poles themselves. In general, we see three possible outcomes:

- The workers' revolt in Poland goes the way of its predecessors. The workers are unable to construct the organizational mechanisms necessary to sustain their momentum. The stage would thus be set for another outburst of popular unrest several years in the future, perhaps with more serious consequences.

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--Disaster strikes. The regime is unable to pull itself together enough to develop coherent programs. The workers out of frustration renew their strikes, which turn violent. The Soviets lose confidence in the Poles' ability to work out a solution satisfactory to Moscow, and Soviet intervention becomes inevitable.

--The major Polish domestic forces work out a new sharing of power with which all can live. In the process, Poland creates a new variant of national Communism.

Of these three possible outcomes, all our analysts agree that a quick withering away of the worker revolt--similar to what occurred after the 1970 riots--seems the least likely. Beyond this there is disagreement. Some believe that miscalculations leading inevitably to Soviet intervention is the best bet, given the intractable problems the Polish regime faces and its diminished ability to exercise control. Others argue that the working out of a new balance of forces in Poland is more likely if only because all Poles appreciate that there are limits to Moscow's tolerance.